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APEIRON

Apeiron: [Gk. *απειρον*, *unlimited, indefinite, indeterminate*]

- n. 1. Name used by Anaximander to refer to ultimate reality; the unformed source of all that exists.
2. The *arche*, that is the beginning or principle of all things, the unlimited. (The term is capable of various constructions, depending upon how one understands the term 'unlimited'—indeterminate, unbounded, without form, without beginning or end, without internal limits.)
3. An undergraduate journal of philosophy for students of all majors at Washington College.

Foreword

With the publication of this eighth annual issue of *Apeiron*, we continue a tradition that was initiated by Professor Peter Weigel in 2003, and sustained by him for six straight years. The first six issues presented many very solid papers written by Washington College students on a broad variety of philosophical topics. While the authors of many of these papers were philosophy majors or minors, some of them majored in other disciplines. We note, too, that submissions of work with philosophical significance by Washington College students are always welcomed to be considered for publication in *Apeiron*—no matter what their major might be.

Volume eight opens with Mac Boyle's unflinching exploration of human enhancement and the ethical implications of such scientific developments, not only as morally questionable, but as a moral imperative.

This is followed by Tessa Fox's stunning exposition of the artistic and cultural currents in Ancient Greek tragedy as presented in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Jared Rankin's piece is a critical examination of the argument for design that is put forth in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, a position that he critiques in light of recent scientific progress.

Finally, this issue concludes with Laura Reiter's consideration of how Confucian philosophy, as understood in the works of Confucius and Mencius, meshes with the political institution of democracy. It endeavors to address the central question: can Confucianism and democracy work together, and what traits would the resulting Confucian democracy have?

Introduction

This eighth edition of *Apeiron* features a variety of essays that we are very proud to present, all of them written in the spirit of fearless investigation, engaging inquiry, and delight in contemplation. As you read, we invite you to speculate – as all these authors have in some form – about the future of human kind in a rapidly changing world.

The Editors

Student Editors: Tessa Fox '11, Laura Reiter '10

Faculty Editor: Kevin Brien

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Resistance is Futile: the Ethics of Cybernetic and Genetic Enhancement

Mac Boyle

In 2008, runner Oscar Pistorius was told that he could not compete in the Olympics because his artificial legs gave him an unfair advantage. Intensive tests demonstrated that the double amputee's prosthetics could achieve the same results as Pistorius's natural legs, but were 30% more energy-efficient. The prosthetics were deemed objectively superior, in the context of the sport, to the real thing¹. Around the world, thousands of people use cochlear implants to compensate for natural hearing disabilities, or pacemakers to regulate a malfunctioning heart. Millions of people receive elective cosmetic surgery, the popularity of which has increased dramatically over the past decade. Thus, we perform elective surgery, and we perform surgery to improve function. Now that we have, as demonstrated by the Pistorius case, the ability to improve said function beyond human capabilities, the question will inevitably arise: is it ethical to perform elective surgery, or any medical procedure, on a healthy person in order to improve the function of their body beyond the human baseline?

This question needs to be asked now, because we are on the cusp of biomedical revolution. Self-improvement has long been seen as a virtue in our society; now that the technology exists for surgical self-improvement, people will want that option. Pistorius appealed the decision, and is now allowed to compete alongside runners with normal legs, despite his "leg up" on them. How long before his competitors start asking for their own artificial legs to even the playing field? We need to know whether we will give them that surgery. As the technology for cochlear implants progresses, might we not

¹ IAAF - International Association of Athletics Federations. "Oscar Pistorius - Independent Scientific study concludes that cheetah prosthetics offer clear mechanical advantages." IAAF. <http://www.iaaf.org/> (accessed November 12, 2009).

one day develop one that hears better than a normal ear? Would people be able to have one installed even if they have normal hearing? The question is unavoidable: the only uncertainty is whether we answer it now or later.

We must begin to entertain various considerations. The first thing we must examine is the prevalence of cosmetic surgery, and the impact that has on this issue: if it's acceptable to replace a person's face for aesthetic reasons, is it acceptable to replace a person's arm for practical reasons? Second, we should examine the implications of the current uses of mechanical augmentation to repair disability: if we can use technology to make a disabled person normally able, can we use similar technology to make a normally-abled person "super-able"? Third, we should take a look at the "transhumanist" movement, a school of thought that promotes self-improvement through medical augmentation: what are their goals, and how can we understand the ethical theory behind them? Fourth, using the information garnered from the previous two considerations, we should examine the discussion of this dilemma between some of the leading voices in the field, and decide whether elective medical self-improvement through genetic or cybernetic enhancement is morally acceptable. Given the overall positive impact of better-functioning human beings and the acceptance of elective surgery, I shall argue that just as there are no restrictions on elective cosmetic surgery, there should be no restrictions for human enhancement.

ELECTIVE COSMETIC SURGERY AND ITS RELEVANCE

Cosmetic medicine is extremely common in the United States. In 2007 alone, in fact, nearly 12 million cosmetic procedures, both surgical and non-surgical, were performed nationwide.² This sets a clear precedent, namely that it is

² Plastic Surgery Research.info. "Cosmetic Plastic Surgery Statistics." Plastic Surgery Research.info.

acceptable to receive surgical treatment for reasons other than health. There is, in fact, very little objection to the concept of cosmetic surgery; many people describe it as vain or superficial, but few declare it unethical, or a violation of nature. Even Michael J. Sandel, one of the primary objectors to the idea of medically enhancing function, seems to accept the concept of cosmetic surgery, and, in his high-profile work on the subject, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, only mentions it at all in order to compare it to genetic engineering:

Like cosmetic surgery, genetic enhancement employs medical means for nonmedical ends - ends unrelated to curing or preventing disease, repairing injury, or restoring health. But unlike cosmetic surgery, genetic enhancement is not merely cosmetic. It is more than skin deep.³

Sandel is completely correct here. The employment of medical means for non-medical ends is the commonality between cosmetic surgery and genetic (or cybernetic) enhancement, and the difference is that cosmetic surgery is, as the name suggests, merely cosmetic, whereas enhancement goes somewhat deeper. To Sandel, this is somehow ominous, and the general theme of his work is that these enhancements should be rejected.

However, I contend that this division establishes genetic and cybernetic enhancement as more ethical than cosmetic surgery, not less. Cosmetic surgery, being only skin deep, can do nothing except make a person look better. Imagine, however, a construction worker with stronger, more energy-efficient, mechanically augmented limbs, or a physicist with genetically boosted intelligence. Genetic and cybernetic enhancement can actually make a person better at their job, a

<http://www.plasticsurgeryresearch.info/> (accessed November 27, 2009).

³ Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 8.

more productive member of society, more likely to contribute to the improvement of the human condition. Therefore, cosmetic surgery establishes a precedent that implies that genetic and cybernetic enhancement are not only morally acceptable, but morally praise-worthy.

ABLE, DISABLED, “SUPER-ABLE”, AND TRANSITIONS BETWEEN THE THREE

It is nothing new to use medical technology to heal individuals with impaired capabilities. In fact, depending on how broadly one defines “impaired capabilities”, that can be understood as the goal of all medicine: to take an individual damaged by illness or injury and restore them to human-baseline capability. Even with more narrow definitions, we have been using chemical enhancements to make ourselves less susceptible to disease (vaccinations, vitamins, antibiotics, etc.), and mechanical enhancements to bestow improved function upon people (spectacles, wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.) for over a century, and their use is considered acceptable, to the degree that we do not consider such technology to be in any way unusual. The question we must now ask, now that prosthetics and gene therapy are rapidly approaching, and in some cases surpassing, the line of normal human function, is whether the use of these technologies to repair disabilities implies that it is acceptable to use these technologies to enhance the abilities of healthy individuals.

A great many people maintain that there is a sharp dividing line between the use of technology to bring disabled or injured individuals to normal human function, “treatment”, and the use of technology to bring fully-able individuals to super-human function, “enhancement”. John Harris, in his book *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People*, expresses no small skepticism regarding this distinction. To Harris, this distinction is undermined because the desire to give people normal function, to, as they say, “even the playing field”, is not the true motivation behind treatment. Harris maintains that the motive behind such procedures “has

nothing to do with equality. It has everything to do with saving a life that can be saved, or alleviating pain, suffering, and distress when presented with an opportunity to do so.”⁴ Harris goes on to cite Ross’s theories of the duty of beneficence, and explains that “the moral motive for using technology to intervene in the natural lottery of life is for the sake of the goods that this will bring about.”⁵ Thus we can see the line of logic that leads from treatment to enhancement. Both are performed in order to improve an individual’s quality of life, the only difference being that one improves the quality of life up to the point of normal human function, and the other improves beyond that. However, in the end, they both have the same general effect, and producing that effect falls firmly under the scope of the duty of beneficence. Therefore, if technological intervention for purposes of treatment is morally acceptable, then technological intervention for purposes of enhancement is as well.

TRANSHUMANISM: THE MOVEMENT BEHIND THE TECHNOLOGY

The position that genetic and cybernetic enhancement are morally desirable has, in recent years, become the philosophical basis for a growing social movement. Like all social movements, it has its own divisions and factions, and a plethora of names for them, but it is commonly referred to under the blanket label of “transhumanism”, which is how I will refer to it here. In his work *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future*, James Hughes defines transhumanism as “the idea that humans can use reason to transcend the limitations of the human condition.”⁶ According to Hughes, this is an old

⁴ John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶ James Hughes, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human of the Future*. (Westview Press, 2004), 156.

idea, dating back at least to the Epic of Gilgamesh and the eponymous protagonist's desire to attain immortality, and continuing through to the present day. It is only now becoming more visible because we are only now reaching the level of technology required to dramatically transcend the human condition. Hughes's description of transhumanism as it exists today, which cites a large number of current transhumanist thinkers, basically boils down to this: The transhumanists recognize that technology is advancing to the point where the "human condition" can be radically changed; it will soon be possible to reshape all aspects of life, including adjustments to one's genes or physical form. In order to best turn this new technology to the benefit of humankind, they want to adopt an open, embracing approach, including public forums, systematic research into the implications of the new technology, and the right for people to use the new technology to improve themselves if they so please.

The ethical theory behind the transhumanist movement is fairly simple to understand, when laid out for us by Hughes. If we accept the premises that (1) it is likely that the technology to improve ourselves biologically will eventually be available, and (2) we are more likely to be able to turn a technology to our advantage if it is examined thoroughly, rather than banned or suppressed, their conclusion, that we should therefore prepare to thoroughly and publicly examine the uses and implications of enhancement technology so that we may use it to the advantage of humankind, seems completely natural. The first premise is undeniably true, as a few pieces of technology that can be used to improve ourselves biologically are already available, as demonstrated by the Pistorius case. The second premise, though it does not carry the same irrefutability as the first, is also fairly clear. We are unlikely to reap the benefits of new technology if we suppress it, and our chances of reaping said benefits rise dramatically if we discuss the issue in public fora and make the technology available for use. Of course, there is some risk involved with that level of public discussion and availability, but it is merely the same risk we run whenever we invoke freedom of information. The basic principles of the

transhumanist movement thus appear to be logically sound, and I am therefore forced to conclude that, when enhancement technology is developed, as it is likely to be relatively soon, it would be most advantageous to humanity if we made it commercially available and the subject of open discussion. Once again, it seems morally positive to make genetic and cybernetic enhancement available for use.

At this point, let us examine the current prominent voices on the subject. Most arguments in favor of genetic and cybernetic enhancement have a largely utilitarian bent. The argument in favor of enhancement from a utilitarian standpoint is fairly simple: if we give people greater capabilities, they will be better able to contribute to society, and thus produce good. Furthermore, people with greater capabilities will themselves be happier, healthier, and longer-lived, which of course means we are producing more good. Let us return to the examples of the enhanced construction worker and physicist. Each of them is obviously contributing more to society than they would have without their enhancements. We can only imagine that they are happier as well, since they can derive satisfaction from doing their jobs well, as well as anything else that can be improved by the application of their enhanced capabilities. We can further assume that they are happier because the same technology that allows them to have these enhanced capabilities can certainly be applied to giving them long, healthy lives. It thus seems clear that increased utility is derived from the prospect of cybernetic and genetic enhancement.

CLASSISM AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

A common objection to the utilitarian argument in favor of enhancement is that, while enhancements may be good for the individuals who receive them, such complicated medical procedures will naturally be expensive, and the majority of society would be unable to afford them. Genetic and cybernetic enhancements available only to the minority would cause a rift, as the “have-nots” increasingly envy the

“haves”. This sort of social inequality, argue the detractors of enhancement technologies, would produce enough negative utility to outweigh the positive utility generated by the availability of the enhancements to those that could afford them. However, Harris, in *Enhancing Evolution*, produces a counter-argument. According to Harris, this objection is merely not taking the long view:

No one can be ignorant of the fact that procedures which start expensive, rare (even elitist), and risky often become widely available, if not universal, cheap, relatively safe (safe enough given the balance of risk and benefit), and widely accessible.... If we banned innovations unless and until they could be available to all, it is probable that they would never be (have been) developed.⁷

So, in one sense, there is a ring of truth to this objection: the technology for cybernetic and genetic enhancement will likely not be available to all levels of society when it is first created. However, like most technology, it will eventually become cheap and accessible, and thus the problem will be solved. Furthermore, if it is apparent that the technology should be generally available, it is not unreasonable to think that the relevant governing bodies would support accelerating the development of the technology in order to lower the price, or even subsidizing use of enhancement technology by the aforementioned “have-nots” in order to move it into wide circulation more quickly and avoid the social rift which frightens many contemporary ethicists. There is, of course, precedent for this sort of action: even now, in early-21st-century America, there is a significant effort to make flu vaccines available for free to all that need them but cannot afford them. Few want the availability of medical technology to establish this sort of division, and so we can assume that steps such as the ones mentioned above will be taken in order to avoid that situation.

⁷ Harris, 31.

THE BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY AND WHY WE CAN'T AVOID IT

Another commonly-cited objection to enhancement technology is that popularized by Sandel, a former member of the President's Council on Bioethics, in *The Case Against Perfection*. Sandel argues that the use of enhancement technology, by making fewer of a person's capabilities the product of chance, will place too large a burden of responsibility on each person. Sandel envisions, as an example, a future in which a basketball coach might see his player miss a rebound and "blame him for being too short"⁸. He goes on to say that this burden of responsibility could erode the sense of solidarity between fellow humans: today, an intellectually gifted individual can recognize his abilities as the product of chance, and perhaps even feel obliged to help improve the lot of those who were less fortunate in the genetic lottery. However, an individual who has gained intellectual prowess through the application of gene therapy, cybernetic augmentation, or chemical enhancement, might "view themselves as self-made and self-sufficient, and thus wholly responsible for their success."⁹ Sandel thus introduces a social rift that may come about regardless of the availability of technology, through the attitude induced by having such responsibility for one's capabilities. He refers to this as the difference between "gift", the product of genetic lottery as we have now, and "mastery", the product of human effort and human will.

In *Enhancing Evolution*, John Harris addresses Sandel's argument, and demonstrates its general irrelevance to the actual decision we must make. Harris is quick to remind us that the human race will be burdened with the responsibility of "mastery" whether Sandel likes it or not. Technology does advance, and, as the transhumanists have helpfully pointed out, it will eventually reach the point where we have the ability to

⁸ Sandel, 87.

⁹ Ibid., 92.

exercise mastery over our physical and mental abilities, through genetic and cybernetic enhancement. Refusing to acknowledge or exercise that mastery altogether, says Harris, is in itself an application of the responsibility by which Sandel is so disturbed. The technology will exist, and the question of whether to use it will gain prominence. We will, essentially, possess the ability to effect medical enhancement upon ourselves, which means that we will have the responsibility that Sandel believes we shouldn't have. Science marches on, as the phrase goes, and no matter what people like Sandel say, we will one day have this "mastery". Deciding to suppress it, or not to use it, or to in any way avoid it, is still a decision, still an exercise of responsibility. Sandel may think that such responsibility is a problem, but there is no way to truly not have it, and so the argument he presents against it cannot really alter the course of events. In short, regardless of the moral implications of "mastery", we are going to have to make these choices, and thus Sandel's concern regarding the consequences of this responsibility has no relevance to our decision.¹⁰

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

There is one final point regarding enhancement technology that tends to crop up in most pro-enhancement works: the right of the individual to choose for themselves. Hughes declares, in the concluding chapter of his work *Citizen Cyborg*, "Self-ownership should include the right of sane adults to change and enhance their bodies and brains..."¹¹ The Transhumanist Declaration, one of the central documents of the World Transhumanist Association, states that "Transhumanists advocate the moral right for those who so wish to use technology to extend their mental and physical capacities and to improve their control over their own lives."¹² Harris addresses this issue as well, through an example:

¹⁰ Harris, 118-119.

¹¹ Hughes, 261.

¹² World Transhumanist Association, *The Transhumanist Declaration*. 1999.

Suppose that further depletion of the ozone layer made humans very vulnerable to melanoma and it was discovered that green skin afforded complete protection. Suppose further that a safe intervention would change skin pigmentation to the required shade. I am sure I would go green, and... I would do it for my children. Others might prefer their children normal and cancerous, I would not impose on them, but I hope they would allow me to save my own life and that of my kids.¹³

There is little, if any, movement to force enhancement technologies upon those who object to them, but those who support them feel that they have the right to be allowed access to these technologies. The sentiment that suppressing these technologies would amount to forcibly limiting the capabilities of those who would otherwise benefit from them, refusing to let them fully realize their potential, is widespread. This may even be an issue of autonomy: if a patient, recognized to be fully in their right mind, wants an enhancement procedure performed, but his request is refused, not because the procedure would be harmful to him or others, but because of the doctor's concerns that allowing the patient to have this procedure performed might prevent him from giving to charity or place an uncomfortable burden of responsibility on him, can we really say that the patient is being allowed autonomy? It seems to me that any attempt to deny these procedures is, in no small way, infringing upon the rights of those who desire them, especially since there is currently no evidence to support concerns about any possible negative consequences.

CONCLUSION: WHY WE SHOULD ALLOW ENHANCEMENT

In conclusion, we can see that genetic and cybernetic enhancement of human beings is morally acceptable. The reasons for this are threefold. First, the precedents established by cosmetic surgery and procedures to help the disabled make

¹³ Harris, 38.

it clear that we are both permitted to perform medical procedures for non-medical reasons and to use technology to enhance a person's biological functions. From these precedents, it is easy to extrapolate the principle that we can use technology to improve a person's function even if there is no medical reason that it needs to be done, especially since this type of elective medical procedure would provide a far greater benefit to society than cosmetic surgery generally does. Second, as the transhumanists remind us, the technology required for such enhancement will soon be available, and to some extent already is. In order to turn it to the advantage of humanity, we must allow its use, as we will not be able to reap its potential benefits if we suppress it. Third, making genetic and cybernetic enhancement available generates positive utility, both through the happiness of the enhanced humans, who would benefit from heightened capabilities, and through the contributions more capable humans would be able to make to society. When we consider these three points, it becomes apparent that the use of enhancement technologies is permissible, ethically speaking. It is possible, in fact, to go further and say that we have a moral duty to pursue the technology for genetic and cybernetic enhancement. All three arguments point towards enhancement being, in the larger scheme of things, good for both individuals and society. Arguing from general utilitarian principles, to put these enhancement technologies to use is the best way to maximize utility, and thus we have a moral obligation to do so. We could also cast this as falling under Ross's *prima facie* duty of beneficence. It is therefore clear that not only are enhancement technologies morally permissible, they are morally desirable and perhaps morally obligatory.



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A Boundless Raging Sea: the Redemptive Power of Art in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*

Tessa Fox

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche described how the creative struggle between two distinct artistic drives – the Apollonian and the Dionysian – once gave birth to an art form that shared equally in both: the Attic tragedy. This art form, this union of conflicting dualities, once had the power to redeem mankind from our own despair, from the overwhelming dread that suffuses our being as we face the chaos of life. However, Nietzsche argued that the subsequent rise of Euripides and Socrates left tragedy crippled, and that now we live in desperate need of the renewal of art.

Nietzsche illustrated the difference between the two artistic drives through an exploration of dreams and intoxication, for these physiological states, he claimed, are dynamically opposed in a manner quite similar to the warring Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. In his view, the world of dreams corresponds to the Apollonian influence, while the realm of intoxication is associated with the Dionysian.¹

The safety and serenity of appearance is, for Nietzsche, the essence of dreaming. Even when our dreams are frightening or disturbing, the experience of dreaming delights us in some fundamental way; this is so partly because on some level, we are aware that we are only dreaming, aware that these images are only an appearance.² Despite the detail and intensity some of our dreams may hold, we are never wholly confounded into thinking that the dream is reality. This is not to say that we do not participate fully in the events of our dreams – our emotional responses to events are

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2008), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

powerful and genuine, our senses are vividly engaged. Yet underneath it all, we understand that the dream is appearance. For this reason, Nietzsche speaks of the clarity and tranquility that dreaming offers us: as we dream, we remain essentially self-possessed.³ It is particularly important that we have this background awareness of the dream-as-appearance, for when we recognize that a dream is a symbolic representation of waking life we can respond to it as such, and thus use our dreams to help us make sense of our conscious reality. After all, while asleep we experience every pain and every beauty that we experience when awake: “not only the agreeable and friendly images [...] but also the serious, the gloomy, the sad, the dark aspects of life, the sudden inhibitions, the teasing of chance, the fearful expectations.”⁴ How better to prepare for life than to interpret our dreams, especially when dreams lend themselves so naturally to the task? Dreams are infused with meaning and poetic significance – “nothing indifferent or superfluous”, as Nietzsche put it⁵ – and from them, we come to understand what living means to us as individuals.⁶ This is the beauty of dreams, the beauty of appearance: that “all shapes speak to us”⁷. Therefore, we delight in the shapes of our dreams and in what they have to say. Finally, because of all this (along with simpler reasons of biology), dreaming is necessary to heal our minds and bodies, and to provide us with repose.⁸

If the essence of dreaming is the beautiful appearance that affirms selfhood, the essence of intoxication is self-obliteration. To be intoxicated is to be under a spell, or in a trance; it is to be drunk on wine, or delirious with the fertile reawakening of spring.⁹ Self-restraint – and in the extreme throes of intoxication, even the ‘self itself’ – melts away. The illusion that separates us from nature and one another is lifted, and we become saturated with the truth of our

³ Ibid., 20-21.

⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

connection, our oneness.¹⁰ Intoxication is the temporary annihilation of the individual. As we transcend the ego, we are overwhelmed with ecstasy, sublime horror, and tremendous awe.¹¹

Nietzsche claimed that dream and intoxication are “direct artistic states of nature” which developed in the Greeks and made artists of them as they imitated nature’s drives. Thus, the Apollonian and Dionysian worlds were formed from the worlds of dream and intoxication.¹² The Apollonian artist creates a beautiful appearance through which we attempt to understand life: we try to make sense of the pain, the horror, and the splendor of existence. In the realm of appearance, logic and individuality are preserved, and thus we soothe ourselves in the face of a chaotic reality. Nietzsche referred to Schopenhauer to illustrate this point: “As a sailor sits in a small boat in a boundless raging sea, surrounded on all sides by heaving mountainous waves, trusting to his frail vessel; so does the individual man sit calmly in the middle of a world of torment, trusting to the *principium individuationis*.”¹³ The influence of the Apollonian allows us to look upon the maelstrom of Becoming without being consumed by it, or by the fear of losing ourselves to it. Conversely, the Dionysian is centered on abandoning the illusion that our self is separate from the rest of existence. With the self, we begin to lose our self-awareness in order to experience the full intensity of the moment, the bliss and the agony of being alive. As Nietzsche says of the Dionysian mode, “Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art [...]”¹⁴ Under the influence of the Dionysian, we cease to contemplate existence as if from the outside, and instead come together to celebrate life and the mystery of its underlying unity. We embrace the earth, and all the earth embraces us – indeed, there is no longer anything to separate the earth and mankind.¹⁵ While the Apollonian urges us to temperance and moderation, the Dionysian embodies all nature’s excesses of

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹¹ Ibid., 22-23.

¹² Ibid., 23-24.

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

pleasure, pain, and knowledge, and exposes the strange contradiction, that pain is needed to give birth to bliss. Thus, our Apollonian world of moderation and beauty must be founded on the existence of chaos and suffering; the Dionysian reveals this truth to us: that the Apollonian needs the Dionysian to exist. In fact, they need each other.¹⁶

Nietzsche held that the Apollonian and the Dionysian, in a rare miracle, came together in the origin of Greek tragedy. Although it seems clear that he believed tragedy's first form to be the best and purest, nevertheless Nietzsche perceived that this reconciliation of dualities remained at tragedy's core even throughout its changing incarnations, until it was broken by the pernicious influence of Socrates and Euripides.

At first, tragedy was nothing more than the chorus; there were no other actors, and so tragic *drama* did not yet exist. The singers of the chorus were presented as the satyrs of Dionysus, Dionysus himself being invoked but *not* represented by an actor. Eventually, it came to pass that an actor who played Dionysus was introduced, and after that other actors began to portray other tragic heroes. Nietzsche clearly felt, however, that even then these heroes were only masks, manifestations of Dionysus, the suffering god.¹⁷ Thus, in brief, runs the development of tragedy; but we must give an account of the Apollonian and Dionysian currents within it. Nietzsche said that Greek tragedy was the Dionysian chorus unleashing its power again and again in an Apollonian world of images.¹⁸ Tragedy was the expression of Dionysian themes within an artistic dream-world of appearance. And the ultimate purpose and effect of tragedy was to offer what Nietzsche called a metaphysical consolation: that underneath it all, despite the perishing of individual phenomena, life itself remains indestructibly powerful and joyful to experience. In this sense, life, at its core, is eternal.¹⁹ Art, through tragedy, snatches us from the

¹⁶ Ibid., 31-32.

¹⁷ Ibid., 42-60.

¹⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹⁹ Ibid., 45.

brink of the despair and the threat of nihilism as we sense how frail we are, how powerless to alter the cruel absurdities of our lives; art transmutes our awareness and makes life bearable, even desirable to us – life becomes worth striving for, passionately, thoroughly, to the last.²⁰

The union of the Apollonian and Dionysian in tragedy is what makes this consolation possible. To see them at work in the art form, we must further examine the nature of the Greek tragic chorus. The satyrs of the chorus, Nietzsche believed (in agreement with Schiller), acted as a living wall that protected tragedy's realm from the rudeness of everyday reality.²¹ This was possible because satyrs, in all that they represent, necessarily *must* shut out everyday reality; for in the everyday world, culture pretends to encompass all that is real – but the satyr *undermines* this illusion. The satyr is an archetype of man before he was civilized, the man who arose out of nature and still belongs to it: the Dionysian man.²² Once again, we are reminded that our Apollonian systems of culture and thought are built on a much wider, much *deeper* reality. Thus, the Dionysian themes of underlying unity and eternity course in the veins of tragedy, for the conflict of satyr vs. culture is also an allegory. Its meaning is this: that just as the influence of culture is not all-encompassing, the individual deaths that we observe cannot fully describe the nature of the universe, for life as a whole, at its heart, goes on, eternal and indestructible.²³ However, the fact that this is brought home to us in a world set apart and sanctified as appearance is distinctly Apollonian.

The Dionysian is also at work in tragedy in that through the chorus, the individual spectator loses his individuality – under the spell of the chorus, he sees *himself* as a satyr.²⁴ His awareness merges with that of the chorus. He feels the truth of his unity with

²⁰ Ibid., 27-29, 46-47.

²¹ Ibid., 44.

²² Ibid., 45-48.

²³ Ibid.,

²⁴ Ibid., 48.

nature and with all humankind as the barriers of society crumble.²⁵ Later in the development of tragedy, when an actor was introduced to explicitly or implicitly represent Dionysus on the stage, his suffering – perhaps shown in the suffering of another mythological hero – was the suffering of individuation; and once again, we see individuation as the *root* of all affliction. We come to hope that the original unity will be restored, and that the “spell of individuation” will be broken.²⁶ Yet once again, it is through the Apollonian influence that Dionysus can appear to us in concrete form, portrayed by an actor, yet believed to be the god in a profound sense (Nietzsche felt that it was even believed by the actor himself). Through Apollo, Dionysus may appear to the chorus of satyrs – and to the crowd, who have become satyrs – as a dream interpreter, who interprets the Dionysian nature of the chorus so that the chorus may perceive it.²⁷ Thus, the Greek tragic drama is, for Nietzsche, the “concrete Apollonian representation of Dionysian insights and effects”.²⁸

The synthesis of these two currents, however, did not survive. In Nietzsche’s thought, as the glory of Greek civilization began to fade perhaps tragedy could nevertheless have been saved – were it not for the influence of Socrates and Euripides. Nietzsche felt that while Euripides meant to create a monument to tragedy, perhaps even preserve it from death, he instead substituted his own idea of what the art form should be. Euripides found he could not understand the older tragedies, and no one else could properly explain to him why they were, in some indescribable way, precisely as they should be.²⁹ Thus he reconfigured the art form in what Nietzsche termed the “Euripidean tendency”: the drive to banish the unintelligible Dionysian element from tragedy, and restructure tragedy around an entirely un-Dionysian art, morality, and world-view.³⁰ Without the Dionysian, the Apollonian aspects of

²⁵ Ibid., 45.

²⁶ Ibid., 59-60.

²⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁸ Ibid., 51.

²⁹ Ibid., 67.

³⁰ Ibid., 68.

Euripides' dramas became too over-pronounced to touch its audience, sweeping away *all* tragic effect in the beauty of appearance, leaving the observer unabsorbed and separate from the events and characters. For the work to have any effect, then, in the absence of the two great drives, it relied on “cool paradoxical *thoughts* – instead of Apollonian visions – and fiery *emotions* – in the place of Dionysian raptures – and they really are highly realistic imitations of thoughts and emotions devoid of any trace of the ether of art.”³¹

Yet Nietzsche believed that Euripides could not have had the courage or the motivation to assault the form of the original tragedy on his own. Euripides had bought into the values of what Nietzsche dubbed “aesthetic Socratism,” whose prime tenet reads: “in order to be beautiful, everything must be intelligible.”³² The ideas of Socrates, thus themed, urged Euripides down his path. Not only could Socrates not understand original tragedy, but because he did not understand it, he could not respect it – or so Nietzsche suspected,³³ for he felt that Socrates was a “non-mystic” in character and that logical nature grew far beyond its due proportion in him. In most people, instinctive wisdom spurs us to create, while it is consciousness that takes on the role of critic and dissuader; but in Socrates, the instinctive force of his *daemon* became the whispering guide to caution his mighty rationality, a rationality that had usurped its proper place.³⁴ In the eyes of such a man, tragedy must have appeared unreasonable, largely useless, or even dangerous and inflammatory. And the chorus, which we have seen is essential to the true nature of tragedy, must have seemed “accidental” at best, a superfluous remnant, embarrassing and beyond comprehension.³⁵ Because he could not in fact comprehend it, all of Socrates' dearest principles – that the virtuous are always happy, that evil is always done out of ignorance – were hostile to

³¹ Ibid., 70.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 67.

³⁴ Ibid., 75.

³⁵ Ibid., 76-78.

tragedy, and eventually, they became the finishing blow.³⁶ The Dionysian was banished from drama altogether, while the Apollonian survived only as a hyper-rationalist drive which prized knowledge above all else, far diminished from its former state.

In time, the salvation of art was replaced by science and its optimism; and while Nietzsche believed that such optimism was necessary without art (for we should have been swallowed in the chaos without something to stave off utter nihilism³⁷), he found science to be ultimately incapable of filling the void. Science and the hunger for knowledge can only go so far – true, it does offer some sort of “spur to existence” in the eternal quest for certainty, and in its aim to not only understand existence but to *conquer and correct* it.³⁸ However, Nietzsche argued that in time, this urge to conquer must lead science to its limits. For the underlying reality of existence defies human logic, in the end: it is too vast to be conquered, and too impenetrable – too indifferent to the transient individual, too *strange* and overpowering – to be grasped. Not by logic, by reason alone. When the scientist inevitably realizes this, the knowledge of science falters and becomes tragic knowledge, whereupon we must either fall into despair, or transmute science – into art.³⁹ In fact, Nietzsche theorized that a return to (and renewal of) art might be the natural – even predestined – conclusion to the path that Socrates began, as tragic knowledge revives in us the need for art’s redemptive power. Perhaps the way of science necessitates the rebirth of art, by its very nature.⁴⁰

In any case, Nietzsche certainly believed that unless the power and beauty of art can be renewed in the human spirit, the future of humanity will be dark indeed.⁴¹ Perhaps he was right. It may be that to save ourselves from tragic knowledge and the despair that it engenders, we must reawaken the pulse of art within

³⁶ Ibid., 78.

³⁷ Ibid., 83.

³⁸ Ibid., 82, 84.

³⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁴¹ Ibid., 83, 85.

the breast of science; we must teach the Socratic drive to be, at last, a maker of Dionysian music.⁴²



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⁴² Ibid., 80, 85.

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: Exposition and Critique

Jared Rankin

In David Hume's posthumously published work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the characters Philo, Cleanthes, and Demea discuss the viability of several perspectives of theology. Though none of these characters dispute the *being* of God, each holds distinct beliefs about the *nature* of God. Demea contends resolutely that it is possible to know the nature of God and the universe, and in fact to know it *a priori* (through reason, or without experience.) Cleanthes agrees it is possible to know the nature of God, but only *a posteriori* (only with worldly experience.) Philo stands safely somewhere between the two, an agnostic of sorts! - he rarely takes a substantial opinion, but critically engages the ideas of others, pointing out the flaws of their opinions. The most intensely debated, and oft recurring of these opinions is Cleanthes' argument for design - that is, from the apparent order of the universe we can infer the nature of a "Supreme Being." Throughout the dialogue, Demea and Philo capriciously assess the validity of this position, and offer us many contemporary perspectives on the beliefs of this pseudo-intelligent design.

But what exactly are the tenets of pseudo-intelligent design to begin with? Although I think it is possible to delineate, vaguely, what Cleanthes believes to be true, this dialogue resists dissection, the conversation dynamic and enigmatic when taken out of context. Criticism and theory are so inextricably intertwined, that it is necessary to present them together, so that one may more fully understand the breadth of the text. Therefore, I must recount what I have read from the beginning, including my interpretations of Demea and Philo's criticisms of Cleanthes' ideas. The conversation begins when Cleanthes very concisely and deliberately posits the foundation of his system of belief:

The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man...⁴³

Demea responds in the expected manner of any clergyman, or religious zealot, implying blasphemy and corruption at the thought of discovering God based on reason, insisting upon the “adorable mysteriousness” of the divine. However, Philo has a much more interesting response: he argues that to deduce the nature of God from an apparent order of the universe is impossible, and that to arrive at that conclusion Cleanthes relied on “imperfect analogy.” That is, there are so many differences between a product of man and the mechanisms of the universe that any analogy they bear to one another is purely illusory. “Unless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon.”⁴⁴ To explain his point more fully, Philo describes the circulation of blood in animals - their blood flows around their bodies, and if they are cut, they will bleed profusely. However, one cannot assume that this is true for all organisms; if one were to say that since blood flows in fauna, then it must flow in all living things, they would be incorrect - look at flora! Not only this, but how can we expect to infer any wider schemes concerning the nature of God when we are nothing more than a result of these mechanisms of the universe? The inventions of the human mind, and the human mind itself, are nothing more than the inevitable result of the “springs and principles of the universe.”⁴⁵ The construction of

⁴³ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

the house and the construction of the universe are in all likelihood, so vastly different that we cannot not assume a “Supreme Being” to have a nature analogous to that of man, nor does this serve as a basis for Cleanthes’ argument *a posteriori*. “Have worlds ever been formed under your eye, and have you had leisure to observe the whole progress of the phenomenon, from the first appearance of its order to its final consummation? If you have, then cite your experience and deliver your theory.”⁴⁶

However, Cleanthes is not easily dissuaded from his idea, and responds to Philo’s criticism, insistent upon proving the existence of God through experience. To counter the argument brought against him he projects a hypothetical situation, supposing all humans spoke the same language, and that books were able to reproduce in a manner akin to plants or animals. If one were to read these books, he would notice very obviously the similarity to human thought, and thus be able to correctly infer the origin. So can we humans, with experience and introspection, infer the nature of our creator. And if this is not enough, just look at the anatomy of the human body! “Consider, anatomize the eye; survey its structure and contrivance, and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation.”⁴⁷ Or examine the male and female of each species, their anatomical and instinctive correspondences promoting the propagation of new life. Demea responds to this assumption directly - to say that we can infer the nature of a Deity, even from this hypothetical analysis, is presumptuous. We are assuming that we have some idea of his characteristics, just as we know the nature of the creator of the books. However, the nature of God is utterly incomprehensible to the human mind. We cannot place on God the sentiments of the human mind - “gratitude, resentment, love, friendship, approbation, blame, pity, emulation, envy, have a plain reference to the state and situation of man, and are calculated

⁴⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

for preserving the existence and promoting the activity of such a being in such circumstances.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, our thoughts are “fluctuating, uncertain, fleeting, successive, and compounded; and were we to remove these circumstances, we absolutely annihilate its essence,”⁴⁹ whereas God is infinite, occupying all times, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. To say God bears any resemblance to the human mind is untenable: it implies either that God is imperfect, or is illogical because our characteristics are so imperfect.

But to maintain that God is entirely unknowable, utterly incomprehensible and divine, is the position of the mystic - or even the atheist and agnostic! How can those who deny a God whose nature is similar to that of man assign him any other nature with certainty? Demea responds to Cleanthes’ objections with the same argument as above, also asserting the “perfect simplicity” of the Deity. “New opinions, new passions, new affections, new feelings arise which continually diversify the mental scene and produce in it the greatest variety and most rapid succession imaginable. How is this compatible with that perfect immutability and simplicity which all true theists ascribe to the Deity?”⁵⁰ The mind of God never changes, he exists in all times, in “one simple, perfect state.”⁵¹ Those who maintain this opinion are atheists without knowing it, says Cleanthes. A mind which never changes, which never thinks or has feelings is not a mind at all - it may as well not exist. If this is true, then Cleanthes is the only true theist! - so instead of challenging this thought directly, Philo endeavors to show him the inconveniences of anthropomorphism, beginning with the delicacy of thought. There is nothing more subject to change than the mind - “...as these causes never operate in two persons after the same manner, so we never find two persons who think exactly alike. Nor indeed does the same person think exactly

⁴⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁵¹ Ibid.

alike at any two different periods of time.”⁵² Changes in age, experience, environment, anything at all prompt new ways of thinking. If this is so, then wouldn’t the world be just as indefinite as the mind of the creator? “As far as we can judge, vegetables and animal bodies are not more delicate in their motions, nor depend upon a greater variety or more curious adjustment of springs and principles.”⁵³ To maintain a universe designed is just tracing our world into another ideal world or “new intelligent principle.”⁵⁴ Philo insists that rather than delving infinitely into hypothetical worlds in search of a cause, just stop at the material world, and recognize that the original cause is God - the cause which contains reason for existence in itself. Cleanthes says he has already recognized this; he does not go on infinitely searching for cause after cause, when he knows that this search ends inevitably at the first cause: God. But Philo asserts that there are more inconveniences to this system of anthropomorphization - this system takes away all claims of infinity, and with it any reason to assume perfection. And if this is true, then God may make mistakes; and how can we know if the earth is perfect system or not? “Could a peasant, if the *Aeneid* were read to him, pronounce that poem to be absolutely faultless, or even assign to it its proper rank among the productions of human wit, he who had never seen any other production?”⁵⁵ Furthermore, how can we say that a Deity created the earth alone, or without trials? Perhaps the earth we’re living on now is just another experiment after a succession of botched trials? “In a word, Cleanthes, a man who follows your hypothesis is able, perhaps, to assert or conjecture that the universe sometime arose from something like design: But beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance...”⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., 30.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 37.

Not only does Philo disagree with Cleanthes' assertion that the nature of God can be inferred *a posteriori* from an apparent order of the universe, he disagrees with the supposition that the universe bears resemblance to human contrivance. Rather, he says, it "bears greater likeness to animal bodies and to vegetables than to the works of human art, [and] it is more probable that its cause resembles the cause of the former than that of the latter, and its origin ought rather to be ascribed to generation or vegetation than to reason or design."⁵⁷ That is, the universe is ordered unconsciously, without design or intention. Imagine a comet as a seed, or an egg, producing a planet or a galaxy. "A tree bestows order and organization on that tree which springs from it, without knowing the order: An animal in the same manner on its offspring."⁵⁸ Nor can we say that all animals and plants are a result of a divine design - that is begging the question. Rather, Philo asserts that at some point, we cannot know how things came to be, and we must cease to assign causes to things beyond our intellectual and experiential capacity. Furthermore, if we expound upon the theory of cosmogony bearing a nature analogous to that of a vegetable or animal, we see that universes arise in generations. Look at the historical evidence supporting this claim! - *Hesiod* explains the origin of nature from the birth of an animal; The *Brahmins* believe the world arose from the web-spinning of an "infinite spider."⁵⁹ Though this system may seem ridiculous because the spider appears to be such an insignificant, "contemptible," animal here on earth, there may be an entire planet of spiders somewhere where "this inference would there appear as natural and irrefragable as that which in our planet ascribes the origin of all things to design and intelligence."⁶⁰ Of course, Philo is not trying to persuade us of a system where the universe is the progeny of an "infinite spider," he is merely trying to free us from the provincial view of cosmogony as a result of design. We inhabit such an

⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

infinitesimally small portion of the universe that it is presumptuous to try and extrapolate our knowledge and assume the nature of a creator.

However, Philo does concede to Cleanthes' argument to a point: "A purpose, an intention, a design strikes everywhere to the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems as at all times to reject it. *That nature does nothing in vain* is a maxim established in all of the schools."⁶¹ Many anatomists accede to this system without any thought at all, so ostensible is the order of the universe - if they observed a new organ or muscle they would not be satisfied until they found the reason for the existence of their discovery. It is in our nature to search for patterns. A similar phenomenon occurs with the astronomers when presupposing a foundation of the Copernican system: "*that nature acts by the simplest methods, and chooses the most proper means to any end.*"⁶² Without thinking, the springs and principles of the universe, which function so perfectly together, lead us to assume the existence of some grand designer, "and their authority is often so much the greater as they do not directly profess that intention."⁶³ Who can doubt the existence of a Supreme Being when faced with all the striking mechanisms of nature? Philo discusses the anatomist Galen, who was impressed with the intricacies of the human body - the muscles, the bones, the veins and ligaments! All exactly working together in perfect harmony; this evidence of a Supreme Being is irrefutable! And how else could we recognize a God who does not readily expose himself to our senses? Philo says that all of these phenomena in nature point directly to the existence of a Supreme Being: "[it is not] possible for him to give stronger proofs of his existence than what appear on the whole face of nature."⁶⁴ And it is not only the pseudo-intelligent design proponents who are convinced by

⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

these patterns - Philo contends that through a small bout of dialectics, both atheists and pure theists can be convinced of the existence of God based on experience. The theist believes that the nature of God is entirely disparate from the nature of man, while the atheist admits that nature bears some resemblance to its creator. Then, if this is true, it is just an argument of degrees - each of these men believe that God exists, they just disagree on his nature; and if this is the real focal point of the controversy, than the differences between the theist and the atheist are not so profound. Cleanthes agrees entirely with these notions, and has no further disputes, the matter of design seemingly settled in compromise. However, Philo brings up one last interesting point - an axiom of natural theology: "That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence."⁶⁵ Though Philo contends that this proposition often ends in ambiguity, leaving the curious longing for an answer and the "haughty dogmatist" disdaining the theory, it is an interesting summation of the argument for design.

Though the dialogue seems to have ended in favor of Cleanthes' argument for design, I think that the contemporary views of the subject were too primitive for an extensive examination. The analysis of the argument for design was often superficial, but not through any fault of Hume's. By all accounts, science of the time had only advanced far enough that we had begun to notice the patterns around us, and we had no cause to assign them. This logically ended as it always had - what we cannot assign a cause, we attribute to God. In the critical examination I will endeavor to lend a more modern perspective to Hume's dialogues, and hopefully arrive at a more conclusive answer.

CRITICAL APPRAISAL: Natural Selections

Part of what makes critically appraising Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* so exciting is that the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 88.

debate is still relevant today - this work is a presentiment of what has become a full fledged religion today; that is, the church of intelligent design. I am predisposed to be skeptical of this system, but as I write this appraisal, I will try to avoid any prejudices which I actively maintain against this belief. However, as much as I despise this bastardization of science, I am inclined to agree that in nature we often observe an “adorable mysteriousness” which resists logical explanation - though perhaps this time, we should not jump to conclusions and attribute these phenomena to God.

But, before this appraisal becomes too critical, I will start from the beginning of the exposition, where, I think, the topics are less polarizing, and so I will have a greater chance later on of maintaining some vestige of “objectivity.” The first major problem I find in Hume’s dialogues is Cleanthes’ rebuttal against Philo’s argument of the unreliability of “imperfect analogies,” where Cleanthes’ counter argument is the hypothetical situation of books which are able to reproduce, after first being created by man. I find it supremely ironic that Philo is flabbergasted by this response. Although the point Cleanthes is trying to make is excessively clear, and a potentially powerful argument, it is purely a hypothetical situation. It is a fiction of Cleanthes mind, created with perfect circumstances to prove that we can infer the existence of God. In reality, this argument means nothing! - this situation does not exist, it has no relevance to man, now or ever, even if books did start reproducing! How this doesn’t occur to Philo or Demea, I will never know; what makes it worse is that this hypothetical situation can still be refuted with the argument of “imperfect analogy.” However, the manner in which Demea does eventually respond to Cleanthes’ argument is one of the few times I find myself in concordance with the “haughty dogmatist.” To ascribe a Supreme Being a nature similar to that of man is totally illogical, and Demea displays great insight when he says the sentiments of the human mind “are calculated for preserving the existence and promoting the activity of such

a being in such circumstances.”⁶⁶ He is absolutely correct! - human beings are a product of the “springs and principles” of the universe!

These “springs and principles” are now more commonly referred to as physics, chemistry, and biology. Many phenomena, or apparent “contrivances,” of nature were often described in antiquated texts to prove the existence of God. Through modern perspectives, many of these arguments are exceedingly easy to refute, such as the ones made by Cleanthes regarding the anatomy of the eye, or the corresponding instincts and physiology of the males and females of each species. Yes, undoubtedly the eye is a phenomenal organ - however, it is not the result of design; not conscious design, in any case - it is the result of evolution! It is the result of billions of years of life adapting to their environment, accruing small genetic mutations, accompanied, theoretically, by natural selection which permitted only the best genetic candidates to pass on their genes. Through all the billions of years which the earth has existed, and through all the organisms which have previously existed, conditions finally resulted which favored an increased cranial capacity as a survival mechanism. This led to the creation of a conscious, and the era of man on earth. So, unfortunately for Cleanthes, anatomy does not suffice to prove the existence of God - our eyes, muscles, bones, veins, and nerves are nothing more than the result of billions of years of chemico-physical and biological processes. Needless to say, this also refutes Cleanthes’ argument for design with the correspondences of gender: as organisms became more complicated, some environmental factor required a greater variation among offspring. This resulted in the evolution of sexual reproduction; the evolution of reproductive organs, and the evolution of instincts to promote the propagation of new life. However, it is at this point I must concede to the aforementioned “adorable mysteriousness” of nature. Even today there are some things

⁶⁶ Ibid., 27.

which evade explanation, and in fact may not have any explanation at all.

One of these topics is the “Golden Ratio,” an equation which seems to have been a subject of fascination since at least the renaissance. Unfortunately, I have very limited knowledge on the topic, and have not been able to locate any substantial documentation about it - however, I think it is a vastly interesting subject, and only with the greatest chagrin would I exclude it. So, to the extent of my knowledge, the “Golden Ratio” was first proposed as a system from which to derive an aesthetically pleasing result, through use of the ratio, 1:1.6. Though this ratio is most often used by artists and architects, what makes it interesting is its biological application, and its recurrence throughout the human body. For example, if one were to examine the human body, one would notice, with careful inspection, that the measurements from the top of the head to the navel, and from the navel to the feet, create a ratio of 1:1.6. Or look at the length of the hand compared to the length of the forearm - again, we see the ratio of 1:1.6. And there are many more instances which this ratio occurs, especially on the face. But it is not only in the human body that this ratio is apparent: it occurs throughout all of nature, in the stems and veins of plants, in the twirl of a nautilus shell, even in DNA, and the spirals of galaxies! But here, especially, I am skeptical - I have no data to prove these claims; they are nothing but vague memories. Yet, if I may offer some speculation, it seems to me inevitable that organisms on earth would develop some sort of pattern, as order certainly exists in nature. It is likely that this ratio is a result of the structure of the carbon atom: all life on earth is carbon based, and in spite of its complexity, life must show patterns corresponding to its fundamental building block. But enough of that! I have not found enough concrete evidence on that subject to portray it as a phenomenon of nature, and it may even be an exaggeration of historical facts, a chimera of the intelligent design movement.

Returning to the text, there is one final passage, which I would like to explore: the ambiguous, unresolved, undefined,

proposition of natural theology. "That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence."⁶⁷ Although I disagree strongly with the notion that God has a nature similar to that of man, I am inclined to agree with this passage. It seems to me that this phrase is inherently true. All life is the result of order, and so it must be in some ways similar to this cause of order. I would contend, however, that to say there is a "cause" is to anthropomorphize nature - "cause" is unconscious, just as evolution, or the "tree."⁶⁸ And I think, if we reflect upon modern theories of cosmology, this supposition is supported. Look at the suspected beginning of the universe: the cooling of energy into matter was an inevitability; from this the cosmic dust which swirled into comets, and planets, and suns: also an inevitability. And from this, galaxies and solar systems formed, along with billions, if not trillions, of instances where life could occur. And on each of these fertile planets, an innumerable amount of species came into existence, and through billions of years more, evolved into more complex organisms, some of which eventually gained a conscious and the ability to ponder the philosophical dilemmas of their existence! So yes, I must wholeheartedly profess that human intelligence *inevitably* bears resemblance to the "cause" of order in the universe! But what of God? Does this conclusion mean he does not exist? There is no way of knowing - we end up in the same situation as Hume. I would assert that these unconscious causes of order in nature are divine! However, these natural phenomena presuppose the laws of nature... and what caused these laws? The manner in which the energy cooled into matter? The pre-galactic currents of cosmic dust and raw energy? God? There is no way to say for sure. As Philo wisely advises: "Let us remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his elephant."⁶⁹

Intelligent design appears to me to be the first throes of death for religion. It operates under the guise of an explanation,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 31.

trying to reconcile the two fundamentally different drives of religion and science in an attempt to satisfy skeptical Christians with a more viable system. However, Hume recognized that an entire religion based on this principle was untenable, and sought only to explore the implications of a God whom has the nature of a designer. In this respect, I think that his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* show insight beyond the dogmatic superstitions and headstrong pseudo-intelligent design proponents of the time, providing innovative and useful perspectives on the nature of the universe, even in light of modern scientific evidence.



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A Perspective on Confucian Democracy

Laura Reiter

This piece is the first chapter of a larger thesis that considers the relationship between Confucianism and democracy with the end of developing the characteristics of Confucian democracy presented below and applying that framework to an understanding of the ideologies of democracy activists in the People's Republic of China.

Confucianism, Cultural Relativism, and Autocracy

Aside from the notoriety of the philosopher Confucius himself, Confucian philosophy is best known for its centrality in the meritocratically based bureaucracy that existed under China's later dynasties. Through a system of open examinations, the educated in China were able to pursue careers in government by demonstrating a familiarity with the Confucian classics, as well as significant commentaries on them by later scholars such as Zhu Xi. Additionally, the dynasties drew political support and a level of validation from the writings of Confucius specifically, as he dictated the importance of revering authority and treating the emperor with the filial piety due a father, an issue that will be discussed in more detail in a later evaluation of these ideas. Regardless, the utilization of Confucianism by the dynasties indicates how significant the philosophy is as a grounding element of Chinese culture and autocracy.

The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, by Samuel Huntington, asserts that the world is moving towards a conflict that is drawn along cultural lines. At the heart of this impending intellectual discord is the pervading Western perspective that its values are universal, a presumption that creates tension when met with strengthening Eastern and

Muslim identities that disagree.⁷⁰ Party to this notion is what Huntington sees as the recession of American soft-power around the world, and what he terms “indigenization”, or the reassertion of locally based cultures; Confucianism is specifically named as one of these.⁷¹ He bases this shift in the belief that cultural supremacy comes with power, so powerful countries are those whose cultures figure most prominently on the international stage. This juxtaposing of different and often conflicting ideologies begins to move the world towards the clash that Huntington foretells.

One of the regions in which Huntington sees this brewing disagreement manifesting itself most clearly is East Asia, specifically China. The economic development, and consequential military and regional power, of China, he notes, is likely to cause tensions in the area wherein surrounding countries are made to choose sides, either to ride China’s coattails or attempt to create a balance against it.⁷² China’s economic and political rise also creates tensions between two culturally diametrically opposed powers, the United States and China, as they vie for broader spheres of influence in the region and increasingly through the rest of the world, including on the African continent. Implicit in this is Huntington’s belief that difference is a source of conflict, suggesting that the relationship between Confucian China and Western ideology, such as liberal democracy, is likely to be equally tenuous.

This implication and its applications to the relationship between Chinese Confucianism and Western democracy are made explicit in Huntington’s *The Third Wave*. He writes, “Almost no scholarly disagreement exists on the proposition that traditional Confucianism was either undemocratic or

⁷⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003), 20-1.

⁷¹ Ibid., 92, 94.

⁷² Ibid., 218.

antidemocratic.”⁷³ Operating according to Schumpeter’s functionalist definition, which defines democracy according to the presence of “...fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes...”⁷⁴, he cites those elements of Confucianism that are presumed contrary to democratic governance. At the heart of this contrast is a Confucian stress of the group or community over the individual, agreement over competition, and the inseparable entities of state and society.⁷⁵ The latter of these he considers the most important, as it is predicated on the power of the state to control the existence of individual autonomy, as well as the inability of citizens to create institutions separate from or that pose a challenge to the government.

Despite Huntington’s contention that Confucian democracy is a misnomer and the fact that his position is commonly held among academics, scholars have in recent years begun proposing the marriage of Confucian democracy and democratic governance as a possibility. Steven J. Hood, in his article “The Myth of Asian-Style Democracy”, responds to those claims in a manner very similar to Huntington’s initial disposal of them, positing such governments as failures to completely transition to democracy.⁷⁶ He cites what he considers the “anti-rights” nature of Confucianism, and the perspective that modern manifestations of this philosophy that do allow for individual rights are “...vulgarized form[s] of classical Confucianism...”⁷⁷ Hood also engages the notion that Eastern culture calls for collectivism, observing that the majority of individuals in that cultural context lack trust for those outside of their family structure, apparently undermining the communitarian nature that is widely recommended for the

⁷³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 300.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 300-1.

⁷⁶ Steven J. Hood, “The Myth of Asian-Style Democracy,” *Asian Survey* 38, no. 9 (1998): 854.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 854, 855.

Chinese case.⁷⁸ Branching off of this, Chinese citizens, for instance, are more likely to look to their family for support than government institutions, demonstrating that they choose loyalty over morality, in Hood's view.⁷⁹ He cites as an example of this a story wherein Confucius criticizes a son who turned his father in to the police for stealing a sheep, stating that it is proper instead for a son to protect his father.⁸⁰ Hood moves to conclude that governments which maintain the significance of ideology and the inadaptability of democracy to Asian culture are using this Asian-style democracy to justify their authoritarianism.

Confucian Philosophy: an overview

Such understandings, however, betray a clear misinterpretation of the rich and varied Confucian tradition. Confucius is believed to have lived about two and a half thousand years ago during the warring states period in China, an era of tremendous social and political unrest. Mencius, who contributed notably to the tradition a century later, lived in similarly troubled times. Under such circumstances, Confucius envisioned himself as a kind of physician for society whose ideas could help to get his country back on the right track. This emphasis is highlighted by his unorthodox, at least in the philosophical community, dismissal of the metaphysical as beyond human comprehension and secondary to the pursuit of an understanding of practical solutions for problems in the world that we can endeavor to understand. Confucius is quoted as saying, “‘If we do not yet know about life, how can we know about death?’”⁸¹ Later in the tradition, Zhu Xi took up this pursuit, petitioning the government to follow Confucian teachings more closely, while also regrouping and interpreting

⁷⁸ Ibid., 857.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 858.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 858.

⁸¹ *Analects*, in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* ed. and trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 36.

the writings of Confucius and Mencius into the Four Books, which became the texts of China's civil service examinations.⁸²

Confucius' focus on the here and now opens the door to his central emphasis on humanism, a dramatic shift that has shaped the trajectory of Confucian philosophy for thousands of years.⁸³ On the most basic level humanism, for Confucius, is "...that which makes a man a moral being. As a particular virtue, it means love."⁸⁴ In the context of these teachings, it becomes clear that humanism is not proposed as some abstract idea or intangible quality. Rather, and most importantly, it is something practicable by any member of society, and is measured according to individual character rather than birth. The equality inherent in this reading of humanism, the highest Confucian virtue, is central to an understanding of the role of the individual within the Confucian doctrine, one that is markedly different from the individualism expressed in the Western tradition, but not necessarily less free or equal. This issue of individualism will be revisited later as one of the areas of Confucianism most misinterpreted by those who claim that the philosophy is undemocratic. In that section it will also be demonstrated how, rather than being antidemocratic, this conception of the individual, starting with humanity, forms part of the bedrock of Confucian democratic theory.

The practice of humanity is most clearly summed up in the "Golden Rule", which reads thus: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you."⁸⁵ This well known statement is, in fact, the negative version of the Golden Rule, or the side that warns against negative actions towards others. Confucius framed the same principle differently in a complement that is referred to as the positive Golden Rule.

⁸² Wing-Tsit Chan, "The Great Synthesis of Chu Hsi" in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* ed. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 589.

⁸³ *Analects*, 15.

⁸⁴ *Analects*, 40.

⁸⁵ *Analects*, 39.

Commentator Wing-Tsit Chan summarizes the positive version stating, "...do to others what one expects others to do to him."⁸⁶ In many ways this is a more demanding set of instructions, as it does not allow one to avoid a specific person that one may dislike, but rather calls for an embrace of all humanity that extends beyond sentiments against cruelty. Confucius illustrates this concept further by bringing light to his own inability to treat those around him, including his friends and family members, in the same manner that he would expect in their position. He writes, "To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me: that I have not been able to do. To serve my ruler as I expect my ministers to serve me: that I have not been able to do."⁸⁷ Such treatment, which emphasizes humanity, remains a goal for Confucians and Confucius himself, and stands as a kind of ideal state for society.

The proper treatment of others is expanded upon and solidified by Mencius, a later Confucian philosopher, in his five relations. They are as follows: "...between father and son, there should be affection; between ruler and minister, there should be righteousness; between husband and wife there should be attention to their separate functions; between old and young, there should be proper order; and between friends there should be faithfulness."⁸⁸ This structure not only specifies the kind of personal relationships that fall under the behavior advocated by Confucius' positive Golden Rule, but also gives greater detail on what humanitarian behavior entails and further institutionalizes and strengthens society according to the relations between various roles. The five relations attempt to organize individuals along humanist lines, as well as to

⁸⁶ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* ed. and trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 101.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁸⁸ *The Book of Mencius*, in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* ed. and trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 70.

encourage good governance, as is evidenced by the righteousness called for between the emperor and those beneath him. In a proceeding passage Mencius adds, "...whatever is needed for one single person is supplied by the various artisans. If one must make the things himself before he uses them, this would make the whole empire run about on the road."⁸⁹ This further clarifies that the relationships between people, such as proper order between old and young, is not meant to imply that the old are superior. Rather, it is a matter of division that serves to streamline relations. A similar practice is used in representative democracy where a limited number of people participate directly in politics not because they are above the citizens, who they in fact are serving, but instead because having every person vote on every bill is thoroughly impractical. Further, each of the five relations is reciprocal, as affection between father and son, and not exploitive. To explain, it is not enough for the son to show affection and the father cruelty or repression. Rather, it is also necessary for the father to show his son the same affection. This mutuality will figure significantly in the relationship between leaders and citizens discussed later. In a country steeped in chaos, as China was at the time when these ideas were developed, such organization, which reinforces good treatment on the part of each party, offered a means of social organization. Once again, observe here that what is called for is not subservience on the part of the citizen, but righteousness from both ruled and ruler. Relationships based on give and take, rather than dominance, also create a social contract-like link within the political sphere of democracy that will be elaborated on along with the relationships of the governed and governor later in this text. Interestingly, the relations as they are set forth above continue to an extent to inform interactions between individuals in modern China.⁹⁰

Recall that even Confucius did not consider himself to be fully practicing the positive Golden Rule. Such a confession

⁸⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 70.

of shortcomings by someone as influential as Confucius may be disheartening for many would-be students. Humanity is not, however, as elusive as it may seem. Concerning the attainment of humanism it is written that “Confucius said, ‘Is humanity far away? As soon as I want it, there it is right beside me.’”⁹¹ This applies not just for Confucius, but for any individual wishing to practice humanity. It is the maintenance of a humanist mindset and continued practice of humanist values that presents a difficulty, as even the most enlightened struggle to sustain both. The original idea that humanism is always within our reach, however, is one that Mencius expanded on in his exposition of an originally good human nature. Mencius believed, “Man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward. There is no man without this good nature...”⁹² Here, as in the discussion of humanity, is expressed the equality that underwrites the Confucian sense of the individual, a central trait to democratic politics. This good nature is, however, polluted by society and everyday experiences. Therefore, any non-humanist or otherwise negative behavior is developed and learned from society, not inborn. Mencius wrote, “If man does evil, it is not the fault of his natural endowment.”⁹³ In order to overcome or counteract these negative traits, it is necessary for man to, through education and self-cultivation, make his way back towards the originally good nature.

Recognizing the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining humanity, both Confucius and Mencius instructed followers on how to become what they referred to as a superior man, a Confucian sage. In this vein, Confucius’ teachings hoped to bring order to the world through the eight steps. Dominating *The Great Learning*, one of the most philosophically important texts in Chinese history, these steps are meant to direct men towards the Way. The steps are almost circular in nature, as each contributes to the others, but can be

⁹¹ *Analects*, 33.

⁹² *The Book of Mencius*, 52.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

ordered in this way: investigation, expansion of knowledge, development of sincere will, rectification of mind, cultivation of personal life, regulation of the family, ordering of the state, and finally world peace.⁹⁴ These, of course, connect very strongly with the teachings of both Confucius and Mencius. For instance, education or expanding of knowledge is the path Mencius offers to get back to the originally good human nature. Further, regulating the family directly connects with several of the five relations and the central teaching of humanity and Confucius' belief that ordering of the nation must begin with the ordering of oneself and one's family. Humanity plays into several of these steps including regulating the personal life and ordering the state.

For his part, Mencius explained the four beginnings as a means of moving towards the Way. According to his adaptation of Confucian teachings, "The feeling of commiseration is the beginning of humanity; the feeling of shame and dislike is the beginning of righteousness; the feeling of deference and compliance is the beginning of propriety; and the feeling of right and wrong is the beginning of wisdom."⁹⁵ To further illustrate these concepts, Mencius offers the example of a man who sees a child about to fall into a well and wants to save him, not because he knows the child or has a desire to benefit from saving it, but instead from fear of what will be said about him if he simply stands by to watch.⁹⁶ Thus, he performs the right action but not for the right reason. It is through these four beginnings that people learn to act the way that they should because they have learned the rules of the game, so to speak, designating what is appropriate in a given situation. With practice and cultivation of these beginnings and meditating on them a person learns the proper motivations for those actions, such as love instead of pity or goodness instead

⁹⁴ *The Great Learning*, in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* ed. and trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 86-87.

⁹⁵ *The Book of Mencius*, 65.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

of simply following the law. In the case discussed above, the man would need to reflect on the fact that he was motivated to save the child by the guilt that would come from not doing so, and from that beginning move toward the cultivation of feelings of righteousness. Thus, by developing these beginnings, which are innate in all individuals and thereby well in line with Mencius' original good nature, a man may move towards genuine virtue. The four beginnings are so central and philosophically important to Confucians, even today, that they believe, "When they are fully developed, they will be sufficient to protect all people within the four seas (the world)."⁹⁷

Explicating further on this goal, the Way, Confucius said, "The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way."⁹⁸ Therefore, like humanity, the Way is always within every individual. The difficulty, once again, is remaining true to it. Unlike humanity, however, the Way is less concrete and easily described. Attempting to shed some light on its nature, "Confucius said, 'The superior man extensively studies literature (*wen*) and restrains himself with the rules of propriety. Thus he will not violate the Way.'⁹⁹ Along with propriety, the positive Golden Rule, as it was expressed earlier, is part of the Way.¹⁰⁰ Finally, like the eight steps, "The Way of the superior man may be compared to traveling to a distant place: one must start from the nearest point."¹⁰¹ To simplify, it is a difficult process, and much like the maintenance of humanity, it requires consistent study and concentration.

The Way is also intimately connected with the Mean, another central Confucian teaching. Confucius said, "I know why the Way is not pursued. The intelligent go beyond it and the stupid do not come up to it. I know why the Way is not

⁹⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁸ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, 98.

⁹⁹ *Analects*, 30.

¹⁰⁰ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, 103.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 103.

understood. The worthy go beyond it and the unworthy do not come up to it.”¹⁰² In mathematics, the mean is the number at the middle of a set of data. Along the same lines, in a Confucian context it implies an idea of moderation that, while not arithmetic and absolute in nature, indicates not going to either extreme. Applying this to the previous quotation, not thinking enough about the Way will not allow one to achieve it, while trying too hard to grab onto it will have the same negative consequences. In terms of the Mean itself, it is explained this way: “Confucius is affable but dignified, austere but not harsh, polite but completely at ease.” By staying away from these extremes, Confucius has struck an important balance that is complementary to the Confucian ideal of equanimity. Those that have achieved this Mean are sages who “...are unknown to their age, but do not regret.”¹⁰³

Clearly, none of the endeavors set out by the teachings of Confucius are easily obtained. There is, however, a great benefit that Confucius sets forth for those who achieve humanity as well as following the Way and the Mean. According to Confucius, “The man of wisdom cultivates humanity for its advantage.”¹⁰⁴ While personal advantage has been linked to wealth and prosperity, although not usually of a material or monetary nature, the advantage indicated here is much broader. The enlightened man’s humanity, as is the case with the enlightened ruler, will benefit everyone that he comes into contact with. As Confucius writes in the *Analects*, “If a man (the ruler) can for one day master himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will return to humanity.”¹⁰⁵

The Confucian Individual

In *The Great Learning*, Confucius writes, “It is impossible that the root be unhealthy and the branches healthy.

¹⁰² Ibid., 99.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁴ *Analects*, 25.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

Never should the important be treated as trivial; never should the trivial be treated as important.”¹⁰⁶ Zhu Xi interprets this metaphor to be showing the relationship between the individual, the root, and the community, the branches, demonstrating that the chance for society to flourish is dependent on the well-being of its component parts, the individuals.¹⁰⁷ This is not to say, however, that the individual is the more significant part of the equation. The references to “the important”, in the latter part of the quotation, is considered by Zhu Xi to indicate the family or group, while each individual is inconsequential and not to be overvalued.¹⁰⁸ This, in essence, summarizes the role of the individual in the Confucian context.

A more holistic understanding, however, begins with Mencius’ notion of originally good human nature. According to Mencius, “‘Man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward.’”¹⁰⁹ The equality herein is absolute, as there is no natural inborn difference between an emperor and a beggar, a sage or a criminal. This is the most important element of Mencius’ approach to the individual. Broadening to explain the existence of evil or wrongdoing in spite of this endowment, Mencius uses the metaphor of a wheat crop, where each stalk was initially the same but grew under different conditions, be they poorer soil or more rain; as a result, the stalks that were originally the same have diverged.¹¹⁰ The same applies to people: “‘In good years most of the young people behave well. In bad years most of them abandon themselves to evil.’”¹¹¹ Even in the face of this abandonment, the four beginnings, which lead to the virtues of righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and humanity, maintain in each person the capacity to be good. Relying again on metaphor, Mencius talks

¹⁰⁶ *The Great Learning in The Four Books* ed. and trans. Daniel K. Gardner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Inc, 2007), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel K. Gardner, commentary on *The Great Learning in The Four Books* ed. and trans. Daniel K. Gardner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Inc, 2007), 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *The Book of Mencius*, 52.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

about a mountain that, once covered in beautiful trees, has been ravaged by wood cutters who took away the trees until there seems to be nothing left, but at night the trees begin to grow again, only to be mowed down by herds of animals.¹¹² Like the originally good nature, he says, “...with proper nourishment and care, everything grows, whereas without proper nourishment and care, everything decays.”¹¹³ What is water, sunlight, and time for the trees is equated to Confucius’ practice of self-cultivation.

According to *The Great Learning*, “Only after things are investigated does knowledge become complete; knowledge becomes complete, intentions become true; intentions become true, the mind is set in the right; the mind being so set, the person becomes cultivated...”¹¹⁴ This process, while in practice less concrete and linear than it is presented here, is the means that Confucius lays out for one to become cultivated. In a synthesis of the writings of Confucius and Mencius, self-cultivation is the practice of returning to original good human nature and a focus on humanity. In this vein, Confucius states, “From the Son of Heaven on down to commoners, all without exception should regard self-cultivation as the root.”¹¹⁵ The Son of Heaven, in Chinese tradition, refers to the emperor, reasserting the equal footing of all people in this regard. So, whether noble or farmer, each individual should begin their path with investigation and the perfecting of knowledge. Zhu Xi describes this practice as discovering the principles, both internal and external, of everything until learning is exhausted; this point is the perfection of knowledge, and will allow the individual to have a complete understanding of the world.¹¹⁶ With this understanding comes the wisdom to act properly according to true nature and relationships of all things, and eventually self-cultivation. This section of *The Great Learning*,

¹¹² Ibid., 56.

¹¹³ Ibid., 57.

¹¹⁴ *The Great Learning*, in *The Four Books*, 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁶ *The Great Learning in A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 89.

in addition to figuring centrally in Confucius' thought, was of special significance to neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi, who were eager to find the place of the mind within the doctrine.¹¹⁷ Finally, once the individual is cultivated, "...harmony is established in the household; household harmony established, the state becomes well-governed; the state being well governed, the empire becomes tranquil."¹¹⁸ Thus, the cultivation of the individual resides at the root of Confucius and Mencius' most central goal, which was peace and stability for the country.

While the concept of self-cultivation is an important one, it does not present a complete picture of the nature of the individual in Confucian society, the sort of understanding that one would pursue in the investigation of things. It is true that, as Ames explains, "The meaning of the family is implicated in and dependent upon the productive cultivation of each of its members..."¹¹⁹ This is also true for the state, which is defined by its composite members. The meaning or identity of each member, however, is also derived from their role within the family and state. Consider society according to this analogy: if the community is represented by a spider web, then each hub where multiple strands come together is an individual. There cannot be one solitary person, as they would have no strands to connect to the rest of the web. The ultimate nature or character of the web, then, would be defined by each of the hubs and how they connect to one another. Recall the five relations: faith amid friends, separate duties between husband and wife, order between older and younger, righteousness among ruler and subject, and affection linking father and son.¹²⁰ In one household, a man may perform the role of father, husband, son, and older brother, depending on the size of the family living

¹¹⁷ Gardner, commentary on *The Great Learning*, 6.

¹¹⁸ *The Great Learning* in *The Four Books*, 5.

¹¹⁹ Roger T. Ames, "Achieving Personal Identity in Confucian Role Ethics," unpublished manuscript; cited with the author's permission, 2.

¹²⁰ *The Book of Mencius*, 69-70.

together. His relationship with his wife, in which each is dedicated to performing their own tasks, is different from that with his father, where he must show filial piety and love, or his son, where he is the respected role model in the exchange of affections. Thus, one man fulfills many different roles, each contributing to define who he is, while his investigation to understand each of these interactions and the subsequent proper treatment of each other member dictates the nature of the family unit.

Philosopher Amartya Sen, discussing how human rights figure into the Asian tradition, highlights the difference between a philosophy being anti-rights and not discussing rights directly. For Confucianism specifically, he says, analysts must "...examine not only what he says, but also what he does not say."¹²¹ Recall that both Confucius and Mencius were thinking and teaching at a time when Chinese society was in need of greater stability, and that their writings worked towards that end. Human rights or freedom were not necessarily contrary to their teachings, nor were Confucius or Mencius necessarily opposed to them. This misrepresentation was likely added to the philosophy by those who focused on the emphasis of responsibility, as in the five relations, which seems incompatible with a Western conception of human rights, and even contradictory. Instead, it is likely that discussion of rights did not figure centrally into the plan to remedy China's problems; many Chinese people were likely embracing quite enough freedom amidst the chaos at that time. Nevertheless, contemporary commentators have found what they consider a human rights strain in the philosophy. According to Ames, the most defining feature of human nature in the Confucian tradition is "...the propensity for growth, cultivation, and refinement."¹²² It is within this context that he finds liberty. The nature of human identity, as established through self-

¹²¹ Amartya Sen, "Human Rights and Asian Values" in *Business Ethics in the Global Market* ed. Tibor R. Machan (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), 48.

¹²² Ames, "Achieving Personal Identity..." 5.

cultivation and relations with other people, is "...characterized by the freedom and creativity to be self-defining and self-aware."¹²³ In order for the Confucian idea of the individual to be relevant and for people to engage in self-cultivation, each person must be self-aware of their existence as a semi-autonomous entity, and must make the free choice to work towards self-cultivation. Mencius, distinguishing between the great and petty individuals, says, "...the function of the heart is to reflect. If it reflects then it will get it. If it does not reflect then it will not get it. This is what Heaven has given us."¹²⁴ Moreover, the path that each follows towards this end will be distinct and individual, allowing them freedom to develop when and how they see fit, in addition to adding connections to others in order to further enrich the self.

The distinction, then, between not having rights and not talking about them explicitly, as in Confucianism, is a manifestation of differing emphasis vis-à-vis the Western liberal tradition. It is the case that many in Eastern societies such as China look with concern on the West, and the social problems that they see arising from an excess of liberty or, to frame it in another sense, the absence of social responsibility. Yes, Chinese Confucians have the ability to make individual life choices to guide themselves down the path of self-cultivation, and to expand their social network through interactions with people of their choice, but that is not the end goal. This freedom is for a purpose, and that purpose is the betterment of society. Drawing attention to this, Confucian disciple Zegnzi writes, "...In working on behalf of others, have I failed to be true to myself?"¹²⁵ As Confucius said, the individual is the root, and while the root is important for the health of the tree, it is the tree itself which really matters. This is especially salient given that the individual nature of each

¹²³ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁴ *The Essential Mengzi*, trans. Bryan W. van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 75.

¹²⁵ *The Analects in The Four Books* ed. and trans. Daniel K. Gardner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Inc, 2007),13.

root is determined by its interactions and relationships with other parts of the tree. Ames draws out this connection when he writes about "...achieved personal uniqueness and its intimate continuity with the totality through family and community relations..."¹²⁶ While there is individual freedom, no man, unlike in the West, is at all isolated from the rest of the community, as individualism is derived through the group, and the group in turn is enriched by the development of the individual, but it is this latter function that is emphasized.

Making the transition to democracy, Ackerly notes, "To the extent that the negative view of human nature provides an ethical justification for political oppression, Mengzi's interpretation is more democratic."¹²⁷ The United States' Declaration of Independence, a hallmark of American democracy, famously states the equality of all people. While Confucianism may lack that political history or such explicit sentiments, Keqian Xu draws on Mencius' belief in originally good human nature, suggesting that "...every man has the equal right and equal potential quality to participate in social political affairs."¹²⁸ While this belief was previously manifested in the civil service examination system, there is no basis for the perspective that it is restricted to that implementation, especially considering the increased availability of education in China today, just as the United State's electoral college, originally intended to check the uneducated masses, has lost favor with a more politically savvy public.

Power Relations

Returning to the pro-authoritarian assessment of Confucian philosophy, Huntington's main concern was the

¹²⁶ Ames, "Achieving Personal Identity...", 13.

¹²⁷ Ackerly, "Is Liberalism the Only Way Toward Democracy?", 562.

¹²⁸ Keqian Xu, "Early Confucian Principles: the Potential Theoretical Foundation of Democracy in Modern China," *Asian Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2006): 141.

dominance of the government over every aspect of life, including creating space for individualism. The latter part of this claim, that the government must manufacture individual autonomy, is clearly out of line with the Confucian view of the individual, wherein this freedom exists in each person's conception of themselves and their engagement in self-cultivation. The broader question of obedience, however, and the assertion that the government commands absolute and unchallengeable authority over the people will be addressed here.

The most significant link between the concepts of individual self-cultivation and Confucian governance lies in the Confucian sage. According to Confucius, "A superior man never abandons humanity even for the lapse of a single meal."¹²⁹ Several passages in *The Analects* are dedicated to describing further the character of the superior man who "...understands righteousness..."¹³⁰, "...desires to be slow in word but quick in deed,"¹³¹ and is "...calm and at ease..."¹³². All of these traits, gathered under the collective heading of "sage-like", indicate the individual who has achieved self-cultivation, and therefore understands all things and is able to make enlightened decisions based on that knowledge, thus enriching those around him and the greater community. It is the sort of individual that is suited to govern. When asked how to make the people obedient, Confucius said, "...Raise up the straight, place them over the crooked, and the people will be obedient..."¹³³

Confucius states, "...a single man may put the county in order."¹³⁴ This single man is the Confucian sage. Along these lines, Confucians offer as the ideal form of governance

¹²⁹ *Analects* in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 26.

¹³⁰ *Analects* in *The Four Books*, 19.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³⁴ *The Great Learning* in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 91.

the sage emperors or well-cultivated leaders, as in this quotation: “The Master said, One who practices government by virtue may be compared to the North Star: it remains in its place while the multitude of other stars turn toward it.”¹³⁵ If the leader is morally upright, then the governed will be encouraged to follow the same path, and in so doing the many roots create a tree that flourishes. Mencius adds to this by stating, “One cares for the people and becomes King. This is something no one can stop.”¹³⁶ A true king, then, is someone who puts the people before himself and continuously works towards the betterment of society by cultivating himself. As Mencius instructed one ruler, “Never have the benevolent left their parents behind. Never have the righteous put their rulers last. Let your Majesty speak only of benevolence and righteousness. Why must one speak of ‘profit’?”¹³⁷ Zhu Xi comments that if the focus is indeed put on virtues, then profit will come naturally in a way that is impossible if profiting is what the leader focuses on.¹³⁸

In *The Great Learning*, Confucius goes on to explain what the relationship between the ruler and the people should be. It remains the case that cultivation of the individual creates a stable family, and that regulation in the family leads to the same in the state to the extent that “...the superior man (ruler) without going beyond his family, can bring education into completion in the whole state.”¹³⁹ The family unit’s role as the standard for interaction, however, does not end here. He further explains, “Filial piety is that with which one serves his ruler. Brotherly respect is that with which one serves his elders, and deep love is that with which one treats the multitude.”¹⁴⁰ Thus, the five relations are placed in the familial context, and the

¹³⁵ *Analects in The Four Books*, 13.

¹³⁶ *The Essential Mengzi*, 5.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³⁸ Bryan W. Van Norden commentary on *The Essential Mengzi* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 93.

¹³⁹ *The Great Learning in A Source Book on Chinese Philosophy*, 91.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

family becomes the metaphor for the proper relations of all in the country. In this framework, the emperor or king is the father and the subjects his children, so it is incumbent upon the children to treat their father with respect and reverence, while the father must take care of the family by seeing to its needs, just as a parent cares for an infant.¹⁴¹ Through this organization, the superior man is able to make decisions that will ultimately benefit all of his “children” and the country, thus creating an ordered and flourishing society. From this, of course, stems the obligation of each member of the populace to respect and honor the ruler just as they would their own father. As said by Confucius, “...One who is of filial and fraternal character but at the same time loves defying superiors is rare indeed. One who does not love defying superiors but at the same time loves sowing disorder has never existed.”¹⁴² It is not the case that Confucians delight in authoritarianism; due to this understanding of the character of good citizens and pious individuals, they do not disrespect their fathers or leaders because they do not take pleasure in chaos.

In reference to filial piety, “Confucius said: ‘Never disobey.’”¹⁴³ That is not to say, however, that there are not provisions for countering corruption and accounting for governance that is not in line with what is best for the people. On this topic,

Mengzi said, “One who mutilates benevolence should be called a ‘mutilator.’ One who mutilates righteousness should be called a ‘crippler.’ A crippler and mutilator is called a mere ‘fellow.’ I have indeed heard of the execution of this one fellow Zhou, but I have not heard of it as the assassination of one’s ruler.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴² *Analects in The Four Books*, 12.

¹⁴³ *Analects in A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 23.

¹⁴⁴ *The Essential Mengzi*, 11.

This account demonstrates the fact that once he strays from the Way and fails to make the enlightened decisions of a cultivated individual, that person is no longer considered ruler, and so forfeits any claim to the people's loyalty. When the emperor is not righteous or benevolent, then he is just another person. Chinese history accounted for this rise and fall of dynasties with the Mandate of Heaven. Those who were good rulers and popular among the people were said to have heaven's mandate to rule, while dynasties who oversaw times of famine, war, or other difficulties would lose that mandate and have their power usurped. In this way the will of the people is accommodated within the dynastic tradition.

A later Confucian text, *Waiting for the Dawn: a Plan for the Prince*, places these issues at the forefront. Huang Tsung-tsi wrote this plan for good governance at a time when China was going through a "dark period" in the 1600s, like the times of Confucius and Mencius, which was characterized by political disorder. Huang hoped that a good leader, "the dawn", would come soon and be able to benefit from his political advice.¹⁴⁵ While Huang covers a variety of subjects, from the character of schools to structuring the military, his most significant contribution begins the text with a discussion of the prince. At the beginning of time, he narrates, there was goodness and harm, but no person to cultivate the former and curtail the latter. The prince emerged as a person who, "...did not think of benefit in terms of his own benefit but sought to benefit all-under-Heaven, and who did not think of harm in terms of harm to himself, but sought to spare all-under-Heaven from harm."¹⁴⁶ Many who were worthy, not wanting to shoulder such responsibilities without benefiting themselves, were unwilling to take this responsibility, while some were unable to escape that obligation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Huang Tsung-His, *Waiting for the Dawn*, 89-90.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

This tide shifted as princes began looking after their own personal gains instead of the good of the people. Huang observed, "That no one can find peace and happiness anywhere is all on account of the prince."¹⁴⁸ He also cites the removal of Mencius from the curriculum, as the writing was not in line with the ambitions of the prince.¹⁴⁹ Huang summarizes, "In ancient times men loved to support their prince, likened him to a father, compared him to Heaven, and truly this was not going too far. Now men hate their prince, look to him as a 'mortal foe,' call him 'just another guy.' And this is perfectly natural." This juxtaposition highlights the same shift that Mencius talked about: when the prince no longer acts like a prince, then the people are no longer under obligation to treat him as one, regardless of how many excerpts from Confucius the government may produce about filial piety and loyalty to the emperor. One of the text's most important insights is to remark, "Whether there is peace or disorder in the world does not depend on the rise or fall of dynasties, but upon the happiness or distress of the people."¹⁵⁰ This is well in line with Confucius' analogy that the people are the roots, and that healthy roots are necessary for a strong tree. No one root, however, not even the emperor, is more important than the tree itself, and so it is incumbent upon all under Heaven to pursue their own self-cultivation so as to enrich others and, in so doing, greater society. The prince is bound by the same obligations.

The characterization of the emperor that is utilized in the Confucian framework, as specifically highlighted by Mencius and Hung Tsung-tsi, is central in developing an understanding of the relationship that the philosophy envisions between the leader and the people. Rather than a position-specific title, as the term is likely read in a non-culturally contextualized context, the Confucian representation of the term is as a reflexive value judgment. Being in power does not

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 95.

make someone an emperor, at least not in the Confucian sense. Rather, the obligatory bonds that link the public to its leader are contingent upon that leader fulfilling their responsibility to make decisions that accord with the well being of the people. This, when coupled with the notion of originally good human nature and self-cultivation also present in the tradition, means that the people, especially in a modern context where education is much more accessible than during the time of Confucius, know what is best for them and so are increasingly able to hold the leader accountable to that standard. Here the philosophy, contrary to what its critics may hold true, "...display[s] greater confidence in the lay person's cultivation and ability to weigh Confucian values and thus to criticize misguided authority for failing to follow the way."¹⁵¹ When this concept is expanded to the broader concept of political participation, using the lives of Confucius, Mencius, Zhu Xi, and Huang Tsung-tsi as examples, there emerges "...a practice of social and political criticism that, when guided by *ren* and the cultivation of human nature, is democratic."¹⁵²

Two Cases: Singapore and South Korea

Before taking the next step and considering what the traits of a Confucian democracy might be, it is worthwhile to consider the combination of those two institutions in the context of the two contrasting case studies: Singapore and South Korea.

Huntington and Hood's argument may be best supported by the recent political history of Singapore. Neil A. Englehart, in his work on the role of Confucian philosophy in the Singaporean context, states that the government of the 1980s can by no means be considered a democracy.¹⁵³ While it

¹⁵¹ Ackerly, "Is Liberalism the Only Way Toward Democracy?", 561.

¹⁵² Ibid., 562.

¹⁵³ Neil A. Englehart, "Rights and Culture in the Asian Values Argument: The Rise and Fall of Confucian Ethics in Singapore," *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2000): 550.

did begin to meet the minimalist requirement of elections, none were free or fair and the government harassed candidates outside the dominant PAP party to the extent that from 1968 to 1981 there were no opposition parties in parliament.¹⁵⁴ Leaders within the PAP were chosen on the basis of their intelligence and moral fortitude, operating under the assumption that the common people are not able to make informed political decisions.¹⁵⁵ In line with this belief, individual rights were heavily curtailed, with the maintenance of restricted press, government control of the courts, limited access to information, and no room for critique of the government. To summarize, “Protest, public criticism, and political mobilization are considered illegitimate”.¹⁵⁶

The Singaporean government, led by then prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, one of the loudest proponents of “Asian values” as a shaper of appropriate governance, used the regional legitimacy of Confucian philosophy as a support base for its undemocratic policies.¹⁵⁷ According to Lee, “...Asia’s communitarian values are superior to the values of the West and can keep Asia from having to deal with the problems the West faces...”¹⁵⁸ These problems that he refers to are based in the Western dependence on argument and disagreement as a means of political decision making, a trait that he sees as creating conflict as much as it does resolution, and that is completely out of line with the way that “...Asian cultures do it.”¹⁵⁹ Thus he has set a precedent for putting the needs of the group over that of the individual, citing Singapore’s economic success as support for such policies. This style of government has been termed paternalistic authoritarianism, dictatorship based on the understanding that only those in the government are qualified to make decisions that will ultimately benefit the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 550-1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 553.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 553.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 554.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 553.

¹⁵⁹ Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 302.

people. In Lee's own words, "We decide what's right. Never mind what the people think."¹⁶⁰ So in Singapore, the end of Confucian informed governance seems to be dictatorship run by, on the surface, what seems a modern day manifestation of Confucius' revered sage emperors whose responsibility it was to rule for the better of the people.

While the Singaporean case may appear initially to support the position that Confucian philosophy gives rise to autocracy, there are several important problems with following the case to that conclusion. Interestingly, the philosophy was not widespread in Singapore before 1982, when the government launched a three-part campaign to educate the population about Confucianism through schools and the media.¹⁶¹ Western scholars were brought in to assist in developing a Confucian curriculum, which was intended to become a "...code of personal conduct for modern Singapore..."¹⁶² While the leadership claimed that they were simply trying to codify the implicitly Confucian values of the citizens, this campaign conspicuously began at a time when the first opposition parties were being elected to parliament and the PAP's base of popular support was eroding.¹⁶³ This, compounded with the abandonment of the campaign a decade later, suggests that the motivation was not only to restate dormant cultural values, but to further empower the autocratic regime that was already in place.

Reflecting on this case, Englehart observes not only the manipulation of Confucian philosophy by the Singaporean government towards other means, namely attempting to subjugate an increasingly disillusioned populace, but also the scholarly conditions that have allowed the Confucian

¹⁶⁰ Fukuyama, "Confucianism and Democracy," 24; Englehart, "Rights and Culture in the Asian Values Argument," 554.

¹⁶¹ Englehart, "Rights and Culture in the Asian Values Argument," 555.

¹⁶² Ibid., 557.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 554-5.

characterization of government there to stand. Consider the following quotation,

...the government of Singapore has been aided and abetted by an impoverished treatment of culture in Anglo-American political science - one which oversimplifies cultures and ignores important debates that are crucial to understanding how democracy and rights apply across cultures.¹⁶⁴

Reducing an ideology as complex as Confucianism to specific rules or doctrines, such as emphasis on the group or desire for harmony rather than competition, produces a system that may be more accessible and easier to work with but is not really Confucianism at all. Such oversimplifications allowed the obviously authoritarian government in Singapore to promote itself as a Confucian entity, when in fact Confucianism was merely a veil that it adopted in order to further political gains. Englehart supports this claim by outlining the elements of Confucian philosophy that were glossed over in Singapore, including both a tradition of individualism and of challenging corrupt rule.¹⁶⁵

In the case of Singapore, we saw a government that attempted to use Confucian rhetoric and ideology toward its own political ends, in practice only corrupting the philosophy itself. To counter this, consider the case of South Korea, a democracy that was not designed according to the Confucian elements that are discussed in this chapter. In fact, it would be fair to say that South Korea's government was not arranged so as to incorporate Confucian values at all, but they found their way into the system regardless. Therefore, this case is not intended to be one that supports the existence of an institution of Confucian democracy, but rather to demonstrate that Confucianism and democracy can coexist. Finally, from this

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 549.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 560.

step it will be suggested that, rather than fight or ignore the Confucian elements of a culture, it may be in the interest of a democratic system to incorporate those ideas so as to better accommodate its citizens.

In one sense, the Republic of Korea is the ideal case for consideration in this context. Admittedly, “Confucianism as a dominant ideology has been fading in Korea... less than 2% of Korean’s self-consciously choose Confucianism as their religious faith...”¹⁶⁶ Despite this, however, Kim Sung-moon argues that South Korea must be considered Confucian because of the way that ideology has pervaded almost every aspect of society, making it subconsciously at play in the minds of the Korean people. Unlike Singapore, the ROK is a recent democracy with a “...a strong bent in favor of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ in the sense that all of Korea’s political institutions are exact copies of those designated expressly for the purpose of propagating and implanting such ideals.”¹⁶⁷ This predominance of Western rhetoric and institutions, however, does not exclude the Confucian perspective. In fact, “Although the vocabulary used by all sides in Korean politics today are couched in liberal democratic concepts and theories, the logic which undergirds the actual practice of politics derives from the traditional Confucian political discourse.”¹⁶⁸ In other words, Confucianism may not be institutionalized in the political infrastructure or even recognized in the minds of South Korean people but neither of those factors has kept it out of the political arena.

To support his belief that Confucian thought is at play in South Korean politics Hahm Chaibong uses the example of the remarkable rise and fall of favor undergone by the Kim

¹⁶⁶ Kim, Sungmoon “Confucianism in Contestation: The May Struggle of 1991 in South Korea and Its Lesson,” *New Political Science* 31, no. 1 (2009): 54.

¹⁶⁷ Hahm Chaibong “The Confucian Political Discourse and the Politics of Reform in Korea,” *Korea Journal* 37 No. 4 (1997): 75.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

administration. In 1992, Kim Young-sam became the first civilian to be elected president of Korea in three decades. He inherited a government that was highly corrupt, and initially launched a series of counter-corruption measures referred to as “rule of man” instead of rule of law because “...many of the reform measures were undertaken through emergency executive orders, or by fiat.”¹⁶⁹ Despite these extra-legal actions, Kim held an approval rating as high as 92% early in his term.¹⁷⁰ Later, however, “...blemishes began to appear on his armor of mortality, and people began to question his integrity, all the public support and political power that went with it disappeared quickly.”¹⁷¹ Interestingly, Kim’s own son was one of those implicated in cases of corruption. As a result, only a year and a half into his presidency approval ratings sank dramatically and by the end of his term he was “stripped of all his authority... [and now] his earlier reforms are considered abject failures.”¹⁷²

How can we explain this dramatic shift in favor? Recall that, in the Confucian tradition, “More than anything, the role of the ruler is to be the moral exemplar and to uphold the ethical order of the society.”¹⁷³ By ordering his own virtues and those of his family, the good ruler can bring the entire country to order. Hence, “The degree to which the public initially supported President Kim’s ‘heavy handed’ measures show that Koreans are still very much beholden to the Confucian political discourse with its strong moralistic bent.”¹⁷⁴ To paraphrase, Kim’s political decisions were supported in the context of a democratic society because of the way that they buy into Confucian ideals that are still very much at play. This is not to suggest, however, that the South Korean citizens adopted Kim’s ideals wholesale on that basis. In fact,

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷² Ibid., 66.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 73.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 73.

his fall from favor can also be tied to the Confucian belief system. As Hahm noted quite succinctly, "...the President's failure to enforce morality within his own family signified to the public that he was unfit to rule."¹⁷⁵ From this understanding, it seems clear that the public that accepted Kim on the basis of his Confucian morals also rejected him when he failed to uphold them. Drawing from this case Hahm concludes "...Korean political discourse will continue to be conducted in terms set by Confucianism and Liberal Democracy simultaneously."¹⁷⁶

This case is significant in that it completely undermines the statements put forth by Huntington and Lee Kuan Yew by demonstrating that Confucian values and democratic government can and do coexist. It also leads back to the central question of this thesis which is, what would happen if instead of allowing Confucianism to trickle into democracy from the outside that ideology were built into the institution itself?

Four Traits of Confucian democracy

The understanding of Confucian philosophy presented here, which includes the previously discussed tenets of individual autonomy within the context of the greater community as well as the ruler as a person who is responsible for the people's well being and who is not necessarily guaranteed their loyalty and obedience if that expectation is not met, points towards the form that a Confucian democracy would take.

First, hinging on the desire for peace and order, "...Confucianists and Neo-Confucianists envision political reform as incremental and subject to administrative stability."¹⁷⁷ Reform should ideally take place with cooperation

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 74.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹⁷⁷ Ackerly, "Is Liberalism the Only Way Toward Democracy?", 563.

from within the governing apparatus, rather than through violent revolution, which would also make it a more widely accepted adaptation not opposed to the respect morally owed to good benevolent authority.

Second, and also in line with one of the roots of the tradition, a Confucian democracy must maintain respect for intellectual elites and sages. While this would not have to manifest itself as a new literati class, as in the old meritocracy, it may instead take a form similar to the prescription of Daniel Bell, who described a bicameral legislature, in which the upper and less powerful house is populated by the intellectual elite who are most capable of advising younger and less experienced people on the wisest policies, taking into account long-term implications of each decision.¹⁷⁸ The primary worth of this suggestion is not the organization of the institution itself, but the space that it creates for the continued respect for the wisdom of the past as a tool in addressing today's problems, which Confucius himself valued.

Third, the democratic political institutions of a Confucian democracy, in addition to providing the minimalist political framework, "...should play a role in fostering the functional political equality of citizens."¹⁷⁹ Mencius did talk about the base equality of all people, as well as their potential for growth, but, like in Dewey's conception of democracy as a functioning and enriching community beyond the political dimension, a Confucian democracy should encourage the development of each citizen through the support of education and the enrichment that comes from regular interactions.

Finally, and most importantly, this model of democracy must be focused toward the broader end of benefiting the collective. It is, after all, the tree that is important, not each individual root.

¹⁷⁸ Bell, "Democracy with Chinese Characteristics," 451-93.

¹⁷⁹ Ackerly, "Is Liberalism the Only Way Toward Democracy?", 562.



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Contributors

Mac Boyle is a junior in the Education program double-majoring in Philosophy and English.

Tessa Fox is a junior majoring in Philosophy.

Jared Rankin is a freshman intending to double-major in Biology and Philosophy.

Laura Reiter is a senior double-majoring in International Studies and Philosophy with a regional concentration in East Asia.



